

REMARKS

There remains pending in this application claims 1-5, of which claim 1 is independent. No claims have been added or cancelled.

In view of the above amendments and the following remarks, favorable reconsideration and allowance of the above application are respectfully sought.

Applicants initially submit herewith a replacement sheet for presenting an amendment to Figure 4. More specifically, Figure 4 has been amended to label that figure as --Prior Art--, and to more clearly illustrate the contour of rib 110a to distinguish it from sliding portion 70b. Favorable consideration and acceptance of the replacement sheet is respectfully sought.

The invention as set forth in independent claim 1 is now directed to an image heating apparatus which comprises a flexible sleeve member, a guide member provided in the flexible sleeve member for guiding a direction of rotation of the flexible sleeve member, a regulating member provided opposed to an end surface of the sleeve member, for regulating movement of the sleeve member in a generatrix direction, the regulating member having a flange portion opposed to the end surface of the sleeve member and a sliding portion opposed to an inner surface of an end portion of the sleeve member, a rotatable member contacting with an outer surface of the sleeve member and a nip portion formed by contacting the flexible sleeve member with the rotatable member, for heating the image formed on the recording material.

The invention as set forth in independent claim 1 is characterized in that a plurality of ribs are provided on the guide member at least at a portion upstream of the nip

portion with respect to the direction of rotation of the sleeve member and a contour of the sliding portion of the regulating member is larger than a contour of the plurality of ribs.

In the outstanding Official Action, claims 1-3 and 5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) as being anticipated by Abe et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,639,195). In view of the above amendments and the following remarks, the rejection is respectfully traversed.

As noted above, the present invention as amended in claim 1 is now characterized in that a contour of the sliding portion of the regulating member is larger than a contour of the plurality of ribs. By virtue of this arrangement, endurance of the flexible sleeve member is improved.

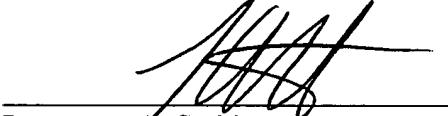
Abe et al. is directed to an image heating apparatus used as a fixing device in an image forming apparatus. With reference to at least Figures 2 and 5, it can be seen that Abe et al. discloses a projected rib 16e at a guide member 16a. Abe et al. also discloses a flange member functioning as a regulating member to regulate movement of the film 10 in a generatrix direction. However, Abe et al. fails to teach or suggest any dimensional relationship between the contour of the sliding portion of each of the flange members 23a and 23b and the contour of the projected ribs 16e. Thus, there is no teaching or suggestion of the invention as now set forth in independent claim 1.

Claims 2-5 depend from claim 1 and are therefore patentable over the art of record for reasons noted above with respect to claim 1. In addition, each recite features of the invention still further distinguishing it from the applied art. Favorable and independent consideration thereof is respectfully sought.

Applicants respectfully submit that all outstanding matters in the above application have been addressed and that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the above application are respectfully sought.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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